

# OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT AT THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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## *EDITORIAL*

### **TWENTY YEARS AFTER**

This year the Department of Marketing Communications and Public Relations (MCPR) is celebrating its twentieth anniversary; the Faculty of Social Sciences its fiftieth. While it is not a long tradition for an academic institution, it is an important jubilee from the perspective of an environment that was relatively unfamiliar with marketing and marketing communications. In the following we shall uncover some of the important milestones from its early beginnings to its current status.

The first preparations for the department date back to 1969 when Prof. Nada Sfiligoj led the elective course entitled Economic Propaganda within the Department of Journalism at the Faculty of Sociology, Political Science and Journalism as today's Faculty of Social Sciences was then named. The term Economic Propaganda was uniquely used in former Yugoslavia to represent the propaganda discourse needed to be undertaken by firms, even though they only had limited autonomy in their policy within the mixed command-market economy. The syllabus was, however, quite contemporary, similar to courses on advertising principles with an emphasis on the economics of advertising in Western countries. The topics covered included: the marketing background of advertising, market research, consumer behaviour, advertising media, advertising message structure, advertising copy, organisation of advertising in the firm and advertising testing. This course was replaced in 1976 with Political and Economic Propaganda. The emphasis also shifted to mainly propaganda topics with a more critical attitude towards advertising. An even shorter duration was allowed for another course, the Sociology of Consumer Behaviour. It started in 1971 and was part of the journalism curriculum only once again in 1976. After a decade of downturn in advertising education we again detect a solely advertising course Economic Propaganda and Contemporary Market no sooner than in 1988.

In 1991, with the help of her colleagues from the Communications Department Prof. Sfiligoj established a Chair of Marketing and Marketing Communications and became its first head. A boost in students and related courses soon followed when Zlatko Jančič left his long career in an advertising agency and becoming a university professor. In 1993, the first independent study programme of marketing communication officially started, consisting of courses such as Basic Marketing, Strategy and Technology of

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Advertising, Market Research, Psychology of Marketing, Language and Style of Advertising and Public Relations. Among other pioneers of the marketing communications study programme we have to mention Professor of Economics Marko Lah, who was collaborating with Prof. Sfiligoj from 1984 on and psychologist Mihael Kline, who later joined the department and brought many experiences from his own advertising agency. In the mid-1990s, this chair began to produce graduates and post-graduates with advanced knowledge of marketing and advertising. The only specialised study of marketing communications at the Faculty of Social Sciences soon became a kind of elite study programme in Slovenia with stringent requirements for new student entry, which remains the case even today. In order to successfully survive the period of economic transition to a market economy in Slovenia in the 1990s, this marketing communications chair responded with an ever improving curriculum and new courses. Younger colleagues, Klement Podnar, Tanja Kamin, Urša Golob, after receiving a PhD from marketing and marketing communications, joined the Faculty and significantly contributed to its further development by organising and participating in international conferences as well as publishing in the leading professional journals. Combining a professional and academic career, Prof. Dejan Verčič strongly contributed to developing the field of Public Relations. Samo Kropivnik brought important methodological knowledge into the study programme. The thus completed chair was renamed Marketing Communications and Public Relations to emphasise the need for the parallel development of both disciplines.

The MCPR chair developed a curriculum significantly different to the more or less standardised programmes in these fields as taught at most business schools. There are, broadly speaking, three university environments for the development of marketing, marketing communications and public relations studies: 1. Journalism/Communications/ Languages; 2. Business/ Management; and 3. Technology. As an illustration of the distinctiveness of MCPR, let us consider what is probably the closest comparison to the situation at the Faculty of Social Sciences – the Medill Northwestern University, School of Journalism, located in the near vicinity of the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, with one of the most famous marketing personalities, Professor Philip Kotler. Medill is the leading institution in the development of integrated marketing communications (IMC) in the USA, an endeavour that has for a long time been led by the reputed Professor Don Schultz. This year Medill changed its name and is now “The Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communication”. Its structure is accidentally almost identical to that of the Communications Department at the Faculty of Social Sciences that consists of Journalism, Media and Communications Studies and Marketing Communications and

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Public Relations. Yet the curriculum differs. While Medill IMC is more application oriented, our Social Sciences MCPR tries to balance the critical, theoretical and applicative approaches to the three separate but intertwined disciplines of marketing, marketing communications and public relations. Firstly, this is a natural consequence of being part of the Faculty of Social Sciences with its rich interdisciplinary and methodological tradition and, secondly, perhaps even more importantly, it is the only right approach in times of the huge paradigmatic shifts that have happened to these disciplines. Namely, traditional marketing (communication) curriculums were based on the managerial school of marketing, where the individual manager can learn techniques for how to cope with ever dissatisfied customers. There was no real deepening into the political, social and ethical dimensions of marketing practice. Thus, marketing was becoming similar to social engineering: more a technology than a science. On the other hand, a critical theory approach to marketing was lacking the broader theoretical depth and even the basic knowledge of constructive exchange processes which was not very helpful to the development of our economy and broader democratic processes in society. Positioned in between these extremes, nowadays we emphasise strong theoretical and/or methodological rigour in marketing, marketing communications and PR studies not excluding the analysis of contemporary trends in application nor a certain amount of due criticism.

Such a theoretical and interdisciplinary approach to marketing communications is presented in the following selection of articles. The selection shows what the Department of Marketing Communications and Public Relations is doing, how it breathes, what were the past problems and dilemmas and what are the current ones. Although the Call for papers was open, the editors found the topics discussed to be relatively coherent.

The selection starts with two papers discussing a very popular topic, especially in post-transition societies, of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In his article, *Zlatko Jančič* criticises the outburst of conspicuous communication about CSR, especially varieties of false communication of CSR (practices) which are present in some companies. Highlighting points of difference between the US/UK explicit and the European implicit approaches to CSR, he theoretically argues that non-communication or rather silent communication about CSR can also be a plausible strategy.

The next paper by *Urša Golob* examines CSR from the opposite side. Starting from the institutional thesis that society produces the framework for CSR, she “maps” consumers understandings of CSR based on the semantic network analysis research of Slovenian consumers. The philanthropic understanding of CSR prevails.

The paper by *Marko Lah* deals with the economics of advertising in the firm, taking financing advertising as paradigmatic for financing other

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marketing communications. He questions the dominance of neoclassical economics and the realism of the optimisation approach to ad spending, showing the potential to develop a synthesis of the investment and transaction cost approach to ad spending.

The emergence and a short historical overview of PR in Europe and the role of the Ljubljana MCPR chair are presented in *Dejan Verčič's* article. It explains the growth of the European school of PR as opposed to the predominant US school. A broadened, societal definition of reflective communications management is proposed.

*Klement Podnar* presents a research paper on organisational identification (OI). A person is torn between being a member of a group of people who work together and being a member of a firm. The main argument is that OI is a two-level construct in which group and organisational identification meet and battle for supremacy. The nature of this encounter is researched on a Slovenian advertising agency's sample.

Close collaborators of the MCPR, *Wim J. M. Elving, Lindy D. Hasma* and *Merel de Boer* from the University of Amsterdam, School of Communications Research, deal with the modern phenomenon of change fatigue that is an outcome of constant organisation restructuring due to the turbulent environment. Based on interviews with employees of a Dutch financial institution and a regional governmental organisation, they constructed a scale to measure the intensity and amount of change fatigue. They also offer suggestions for how to prevent it.

*Tanja Kamin* examines the role of social marketing as a way to achieve social change. She theorises that its use depends on the nature of society outlined in the form of a continuum between paternalistic, liberal paternalistic and libertarian approaches to social change. Slovenia, as she proposes, could be characterised as a paternalistic society and thereby slow in acceptance of the social marketing philosophy.

*Samo Kropivnik* and *Nataša Kežzar's* paper deals with Internet metrics and is based on an empirical study of Slovenian national sites. Besides giving insights into the state of Internet advertising in Slovenia, their paper suggests the upgrading of conventional reach figures using network analysis.

*Mihael Kline* and *Nuša Fain* examine a new idea in product development that promotes the use of virtual teams. The relative freedom arising from organisational boundaries and its internal problems enables independent creatives to perform better and, together with in-house researchers, produce higher level results for an organisation. The results of the author's study confirm the positive attitude to such arrangements in the student population.

We believe that the present selection of articles, as well as many other activities (organisation of conferences, the Erasmus Mundus project etc.)

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of the MCPR Chair at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana, confirms that it has grown into a strong regional hub of marketing communications and public relations knowledge with the promising potential to transgress national borders.

Zlatko Jančič, Marko Lah  
Guest editors of the special issue